

Advent Relives Mystery of God's Coming to Man

Following are excerpts from the text of Pope John Paul's address to the general audience of Nov. 29.

We are now accustomed to the term "advent;" we know what it means, but precisely because of the fact that we have become so familiar with it, we do not succeed, perhaps in understanding all the riches that this concept contains.



Advent means "coming."

We must therefore ask ourselves: who comes; and for whom does he come?

We find the answer to this question at once. Even children know that it is Jesus who comes, for them and for all men. He comes one night at Bethlehem. He is born in a grotto, which was used as a cow shed.

The children know this, and so do the adults who participate in the children's joy, and who, on Christmas Night, seem to become children too.

There are many questions, however, that are asked. Man has the right, and even the duty, to question in order to know. There are also those who doubt and, although they take part in the joy of Christmas, seem extraneous to the truth it contains.

For this very reason we have the time of Advent, so that every year we can penetrate again into this essential truth of Christianity.

The truth of Christianity corresponds to two fundamental realities which we can never lose sight of. Both are closely connected; and this precise link, such a deep one that one reality seems to explain the other, is the characteristic note of Christianity.

The first reality is called "God," the second one "man." Christianity arises from a special mutual relationship between God and man. In recent times — particularly during the Second Vatican Council — there have been long discussions as to whether this relationship is theocentric or anthropocentric. There will never be a satisfactory answer to this question if we continue to consider the two terms of the question separately. In fact, Christianity is anthropocentric precisely because it is fully theocentric; and simultaneously it is theocentric, thanks to its extraordinary anthropocentrism.

But it is just the mystery of the Incarnation which, in itself, explains this relationship.

It is for this reason that Christianity is not only a "religion of Advent," but Advent itself. Christianity



'Christianity is not only a "religion of Advent," but Advent itself.'

lives the mystery of God's real coming to man, and throbs and pulsates constantly with this reality. It is simply the very life of Christianity.

It is a question of a reality that is at once deep and simple, that is near the understanding and sensitiveness of every man and especially of those who, on the occasion of Christmas night, are able to become children. Not in vain did Jesus once say: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

To understand thoroughly this double reality with which Christianity throbs and pulsates every day, it is necessary to go back to the very beginnings of Revelation, in fact almost to the beginnings of human thought.

At the beginnings of human thought there can be various conceptions. The thought of every individual has its own history in his life from childhood. However; speaking of the "beginning," we do not intend to deal with the history of thought. We wish on the contrary to ascertain that at the very foundations of thought, that is, there is the concept of "God" and the concept of "man." Sometimes they are covered up with a layer of many other different concepts (in particular the present day civilization of "materialistic" and also "technocratic reification.") — but that does not mean that those concepts do not exist or are not at the foundation of our thought. Even the most elaborate atheistic system makes sense only on the supposition that it knows the meaning of the idea of "Theos," that is God.

In this connection, the pastoral Constitution of Vatican II rightly teaches us that many forms of atheism are derived from lack of an adequate relationship with this concept of God. They are therefore, or at least may be, negations of something or

rather of Someone other who does not correspond to the true God.

Advent — as a liturgical period of the ecclesial year — takes us back to the beginnings of Revelation. And at the very beginning we at once meet the fundamental connection of these two realities: God and man.

Picking up the first book of Holy Scripture, Genesis, we begin to read: In the beginning he created . . . There follows the name of God, which in this biblical text reads "Elohim." In the beginning he created, and the one who created is God. These words constitute, as it were, the threshold of Revelation. At the beginning of the book of Genesis, God is defined not only with the name Elohim, at other places he is called Yahweh.

The verb "created" speaks of him even more clearly. This verb, in fact, reveals God, who God is. It expresses his substance not so much in itself as in relation to the world, that is, to all creatures subject to the laws of time and space. The circumstantial adverbial phrase "in the beginning" indicates God as the One who exists before this beginning, who is not limited either by time or space, and who "creates," "gives a beginning" to everything that is not God, and which constitutes the visible and invisible world (according to Genesis: the heavens and the earth.)

In this context the verb "created" says of God in the first place that he himself exists, that he is, that he is the fulness of being, that this fulness is manifested as Omnipotence, and that this Omnipotence is at once Wisdom and Love. The first sentence of Holy Scripture tells us all this about God. In this way the concept of God is formed in our intellect, if we refer to the beginnings of Revelation.

We wish also to note that at the beginning of Revelation we find the fundamental truth about man, whom God (Elohim) creates in his "image and likeness." We read, in fact: "God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness," and further on, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

We will return to the problem of man. But already today we must point out special relationship between God and his image, that is, man.

This relationship enlightens us on the very foundations of Christianity.

It also enables us to give a fundamental answer to two questions: first, what is the meaning of Advent; second, why precisely is Advent a part of the very substance of Christianity?

I leave these questions to your reflection. We will come back to them in our future meditations and more than once. The reality of Advent is full of the deepest truth on God and on man.

More Opinions

Refusal of Garb A 'Scandalous' Sin

Editor:

Father Louis Hohman's portrait (Courier-Journal, 11/29/78) of lay-image priests and religious blindly seeking recognition of self-professed love of God and neighbor evokes the need for prayer, compassion and charity. Charity, though inseparable from Truth, is often emotionally misperceived as hostility. Objectively (Vatican II documents), the refusals of priests and religious to wear religious garb are sins of scandalous disobedience.

The charitable necessity for teaching and guarding the deposit of Faith, and for faithful obedience of priests are major concerns which Pope John Paul II is emphasizing to the bishops.

It seems trivial to mention that Our Lord advises not only priests but all to strive for perfection — to profess and witness His presence by thought, word and deed. Centuries before contemporary awareness of the merits of audio-visual aids, Our Lord led priests and religious to wear religious garb. It is the explicit written Will of God (Vatican II, Popes Paul VI and John Paul II) that religious garb continue to be worn as a wise, effective means for elevating their own and other people's minds and hearts to awareness of His Holy Presence.

Joseph J. Murray
38 Wyndover Road
Rochester, N.Y. 14616

NFP Is Denied UCC Funding

Editor:

We would like to inform

your readers about our status with United Community Chest for 1979 funding. Many have called our office requesting this information.

Our application for funding has been denied. The reasons were given by the Director of Planning, Evaluation and Allocations. \$2 1/2 million were requested from 91 applications; we were not considered one of their priorities. He mentioned that family planning was not one of their priorities.

Last year, Planned Parenthood of Monroe County received \$191,000 from the Community Chest. Our 1979 funding request totaled \$10,000.

It does not seem fair to us that the alternative to artificial contraceptives is not also funded. Planned Parenthood and other family planning specialists made referrals to our office

this past year. Couldn't we share a small part of the \$191,000?

We are greatly in need of funds.

Dr. and Mrs. Francis Foley, Mr. and Mrs. William Jackson, Mrs. Eugene Lilly, Mr. and Mrs. Richard T. O'Hara, Mr. Douglas Osborn, Mr. and Mrs. Emanuel R. Petracca, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Staropoli, Mr. and Mrs. Ron Young,
Board of Directors
Natural Family Planning Education of Rochester, N.Y., Inc.
89 Genesee St.
Rochester, N.Y. 14611

Charge Denied

Editor:

A letter to the editor in your Nov. 22 issue called Right to Life people narrow minded.

Who could be more broad minded than a person who would defend the unborn?

Please know that Right to Life people are concerned about other life issues. Getting people to respect another life would be this nation's biggest accomplishment — and is so necessary!

There is no issue more important than the life issue.

Please don't be alarmed by a one-issue candidate if the issue is life. By supporting that candidate, you will be supporting yourself.

Eileen Dougherty
33 Clinton St.
Avon, N.Y. 14414

Reports Cite Rosary Upswing

Editor:

Recent news in national periodicals of an increase

in devotion to Mary is confirmed by an immense demand for rosaries in mission countries. If any readers would like to help spread devotion to Mary they may send rosaries — new, used, or broken — to:

Apostolate of Christian Action
PO Box 24
Fresno, Calif. 93707

There is also a great need for rosary making. In 1975 Our Lady's Rosary Makers sent out more than 1,500,000 mission rosaries. In 1977 some 12,000 rosary makers sent out almost two million, but the demand is for millions more. Those who would like more information on rosary-making may write to:

Our Lady's Rosary Makers
4611 Poplar Level Rd.
Louisville, Ky. 40213

Lawrence B. Severson
PO Box 132
Albany, N.Y. 12201